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Testimony regarding House Bills 4188, 4189 and 4190
House Committee on Families, Children, and Seniors
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Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

My name is Sommer Foster, I am the director of political advocacy for Equality Michigan – we are the only statewide anti-violence and advocacy organization serving Michigan’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. On behalf of our members and supporters across the state, Equality Michigan urges you to oppose HB 4188, 4189 and 4190, which would provide child-placing agencies with a broad right to deny an adoption based on any criteria they deem contrary to their religious or moral convictions. Permitting such broad discretionary authority will have unforeseen harm on the adoption process in Michigan.

Our state sanctioning a license to discriminate is unethical. With 13,000 children in Michigan’s foster care system at one time with at least 3,000 actively seeking a safe home to prosper in, our focus should be on cultivating stable environments to raise these children. We should not be turning away capable and willing families eager to love and support a child in need. In fact Michigan law and courts require that the best interests of the child be paramount when placing a child. In the past, this legislation ultimately failed based on the fact that asserting a religious or moral objection undermines state law.

The implications of this bill are broad and could serve as a barrier to placements not just with LGBT people but also with anyone who is single has been divorced or who practices a different religion.

These bills, which allow a child-placing agency to refuse a child placement because it offends their religious tenants, which makes these bills, are an attempt to write religious discrimination into Michigan law. The agencies that are the subject of this package of legislation are agents of the State of Michigan and because they receive state funding, as such the state should not legalize discriminatory practices with agencies using millions of dollars in state resources.

We have heard over and over, that these adoption agencies already practice these policies, but with over 3,000 kids in the system waiting for forever homes, do we really want to codify these practices into state law? What will legalizing this type of discrimination say about our state and our values in ten, twenty, or fifty years? How will history and our children judge our actions?

Is reintroducing this bill the best use of our time here today? Are there no greater issues impacting Michigan’s families and children which deserve our attention?

ONE crisis is real, and that is that Michigan's children need homes and Michigan's 13,000 foster care kids need leaders to clear pathways, not create obstacles, to safe and loving forever homes.

Anyone who stands between a child and the loving and capable family they so desperately need is not focusing on solutions, but instead adding to the problems of these young people. We can do better at caring for our most vulnerable, and we owe it to these children and to Michigan to spend more time trying.

Equality Michigan urges you to **vote no on these bills.**